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Conservation and sustainable development of Central African forest ecosystems: implementation of General Assembly resolution 54/214

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared as a response to the request of the General Assembly, at its fifty-fourth session, to report on the implementation of resolution 54/214 on the conservation and sustainable development of Central African forest ecosystems. Over the past decade, Central Africa and its Congo Basin have been subject to extensive support from the international community. This report gives examples of the various activities of international organizations that are currently in progress in the region. Many of these activities are consistent with the proposals for action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), and are geared towards their implementation. The report also identifies some of the major problems and obstacles in the efforts towards sustainable forest management in the countries of Central Africa.

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I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, at its fifty-fourth session, adopted resolution 54/214 of 22 December 1999 concerning the conservation and sustainable development of Central African forest ecosystems. In that resolution, the Assembly welcomed the Declaration adopted by the Summit of Central African Heads of State on the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Tropical Forests, held in Yaoundé from 12 to 17 March 1999 (A/C.2/54/5, annex), and encouraged the countries of Central Africa to implement the undertakings set out in the Yaoundé Declaration that had called for action on, *inter alia*, harmonized national policies; participation of the rural population and the business community in decision-making; industrialization; protected transborder zones; tax systems in favour of sustainable forest management; concerted efforts to stamp out poaching and other non-sustainable exploitation; and establishment of financing mechanisms that used revenue generated by the forest sector and international cooperation.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly invited the international community to support the countries of Central Africa in the implementation of the Yaoundé Declaration. It also encouraged the international community, when considering ways and means of achieving the conservation and sustainable management of all types of forests, to take into account, *inter alia*, the forests of the Central African subregion. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to its fifty-fifth session on the implementation of resolution 54/214, within the context of the reporting emanating from the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) and taking into account other reporting requests under the item entitled "Environment and sustainable development".

3. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as well as some members of the International Forestry Advisers Group (IFAG) have contributed to the preparation of the present report. Information from other members of the informal, high-level Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests (ITFF)[1] has also been used.

II. Background

4. Over the past decade, Central Africa and its Congo Basin have been the recipient of extensive support from the international community, as this African subregion is home to 210 million hectares of tropical dense forest ecosystems and harbours about 400 mammalian species, not less than 1,000 different species of birds and, 10,000 plant species of which about 3,000 are endemic (FAO). The forests of the region are used either for economic development or for subsistence, depending on the endowment of the forest cover in a country.

5. On average, Central Africa (consistent with a similar trend in some other parts of Africa as well) has experienced a few years of steady growth, which has fostered economic revival in several countries. Many countries have had a positive gross domestic product (GDP) growth, that is to say, national income has grown faster than population. In 1998, economic growth was less strong, largely as a result of the Asian financial crisis. Poverty is still, however, a major problem of the region.

6. Besides the continuous quest for economic development, Central Africa's specific forest-related needs include strategies that reconcile development requirements with conservation imperatives and the need to integrate the forest sector into rural development.

7. In general, lack of institutional capacity and efficient law enforcement, as well as poor governance, gives way to illegal trade in forest products, and thus makes sustainable forest management with long-term profits less favourable (see further the report of IFF on its fourth session (E/CN.17/2000/14), for example, para. 58). These problems occur not only in some parts of Central Africa but in many other parts of the world as well. According to World Bank as well as some non-governmental organization estimates, attention has been increasingly paid to such problems and efforts are under way to eliminate these unsustainable practices.

III. Reference to Central Africa in the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IPF/IFF) processes

8. The Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and its successor, IFF, did not recommend actions aimed specifically at Central Africa. However, many of the IPF/IFF proposals for action are relevant to individual governments, both developed and developing, as well as organizations. Both IPF and IFF deliberated many politically sensitive issues that are of specific interest to Central Africa, such as international trade in relation to sustainable forest management, transfer of technology and adequate financial resources in support of sustainable forest management. Furthermore, both IPF and IFF called for enhanced and coordinated regional collaboration.

9. The collaboration within the region related to international forest policy issues was reinforced through the so-called Costa Rica-Canada initiative. It organized regional consultations in support of the IFF deliberations on future international arrangements on forests. One of the consultations was held for West and Central Africa, in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 18 to 22 October 1999. Another, the pan-African consultation for the preparation of the fourth session of IFF, took place at the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment, in Nairobi, Kenya, from 25 to 27 January 2000.

10. Another example from among the initiatives in support of IFF that have specific significance also for Central Africa is the initiative on Addressing the Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Forest Degradation, initiated by a coalition of non-governmental organizations. The workshop of the initiative was held in San José, Costa Rica, from 18 to 22 January 1999.

IV. Support from the international community

11. In its resolution 54/214, the General Assembly invited the international community to support the countries of Central Africa in their efforts towards sustainable development and conservation of forests. The following examples of the various programmes and projects illustrate some of the work of multilateral and international organizations in support of this objective. Many of these projects can be seen as part of the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action, in particular the support to national forest programmes.

12. FAO has been active in Cameroon, the Congo, Gabon and the Central African Republic, and at the regional level through the African Timber Organization. The projects have focused on capacity-building in forest policy and institutions, and training as well as forest inventories and management. Initiatives on forest conservation are supported also by the European Community (EC), the United States of America and the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

13. FAO has continued to strengthen its collaboration with the private forest industry. It has intensified the dialogue with *Association technique internationale des bois tropicaux* (ATIBT), the Interafrican Forest Industry Association (IFIA) and the European Foundation for the Preservation of African Forest Resources. Some members of these associations are actively involved in the World Bank chief executive officers' (CEOs') ad hoc Forum on forests, organized under the chairmanship of the President of the World Bank. Collaboration with ATIBT includes preparation of publications and the planned "Model Code of Forest Harvesting Practice".

14. Other FAO activities and partnership developments include the Forestry Outlook Study for Africa; data collection and analysis (FAO/EC project); case studies on forest harvesting (FAO/EC project); and various capacity-building projects, including forest legislation in Brazzaville, the Congo, forest management in Cameroon, and the National Forest Programme in Equatorial Guinea and the Central African Republic.

15. Inadequate forest research capacity is a major constraint on generation and implementation of knowledge and technology, which are necessary for the sustainable management of forests, a major natural resource in the region. In cooperation with other international and regional institutions, FAO has been working towards alleviating these constraints through support to existing regional networks such as the Forestry Network of the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (WECARD). The Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) is engaged in forest research specifically aimed at addressing regional problems

through its research staff located in a regional office in Yaoundé, Cameroon. CIFOR programmes concentrate on adaptive co-management, underlying causes of deforestation and forests products and people.

16. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has continued its involvement in Central Africa through support to national forest programmes in Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon. Furthermore, in Cameroon, its activities have included setting up a consultative forum for dialogue between stakeholders; and institutional strengthening to increase the technical and operational capacity in order to coordinate, at the national level, various ongoing forest programmes. Planned activities include training of forest officers in the monitoring of management plans and design of strategies for financial mechanisms for sustainable forest management.

17. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has various activities related to forests in Central Africa. Support for Africa is among UNEP's major global priorities, for instance, through international conventions on biological diversity and desertification. UNEP has programmes adapted to the GEF work programme, including the Special Initiative for Africa on Land and Water. A major thrust of UNEP's work is strengthening human, managerial and institutional capacity at both the subregional and national levels. UNEP is also enhancing partnerships between Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

18. The World Bank finances various activities related to sustainable forest management in Central Africa, including strengthening the institutional capacity, improving communication and collaboration among the Governments, civil society and the private sector, adjusting the incentive framework, and creating international confidence.

19. The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), in collaboration with donor countries, supports numerous projects in the region related to economic information and market intelligence, reforestation and forest management and forest industry. To mention just a few of them: Regionalization of the Volume Tables for Trees of Natural Forests and Plantations in Côte d'Ivoire; Forest Management, Community Involvement and Sustainable Use of a Coastal Province Forest Area in Cameroon; and Rehabilitating Degraded Forest through Collaboration with Local Communities in Ghana.

20. Many other bilateral initiatives are currently in progress in the different countries of this region. A large number of activities are reported, in particular by Cameroon. Examples include Canada's support to new forest legislation and local controls on the use of forests; and the support of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to fiscal reform.

21. Besides the initiatives noted above, there is also activity being undertaken by non-government organizations in the region. For example, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources-World Conservation Union (IUCN) supports the Ministerial Conference on Dense Forest Ecosystems of Central Africa (CEFDHAC). The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) sponsored the Yaoundé forest summit involving Heads of States of nine Central African countries, and has undertaken many other activities in the region as well.

22. Further information on forests and international collaboration is available through the national reports that many countries of the region have submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development.[2] FAO, the World Bank and many other international organizations have national forest-related information published on their web sites. Furthermore, UNDP, UNEP, the World Bank and the World Resources Institute have published *A Guide to World Resources 2000-2001: People and Ecosystems: the Fraying Web of Life*,[3] as a summary of findings of a more comprehensive publication, *World Resources 2000-2001* which will include the information of more than 150 countries, including those of Central Africa.

V. Concluding remarks

23. A complete assessment of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 54/214 would be premature, as less than one year has elapsed since its adoption. Some general observations, however, could be made.

24. A large number of initiatives, programmes and projects are in progress in Central Africa in collaboration with the international community. These activities are geared towards implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action. It would be desirable if the lessons learned from the involvement of many

organizations in certain countries of the region, particularly Cameroon, could be shared with, and extended to, other countries of the region.

25. Improvements achieved by individual countries of the region, especially at the policy level, are also visible. The problems are now well identified, but action still needs to be intensified, with more effective coordination among various partners, at both the international and the national level.

26. There is still a general sense that tropical forests are threatened and that unsustainable forest management practices are still widespread. The major obstacles and problems include limited capacity of the Governments to contribute to the financing of projects; complicated bureaucratic procedures; and lack of transparency in operations of the forest sector, favouring unsustainable forest management activities. There is also a salient lack of effective coordination between different sectors, leading to overlap and competition between them.

27. Participation of civil society, especially rural people and private industry, in forest management needs to be strengthened. Further attention needs to be paid also to biodiversity conservation, including creation of protected areas, sustainable management of non-timber forest products, and classification of forest management units.

28. Enhanced financial support for the transition period from "business as usual" to sustainable forest management is necessary. This would involve coordinated donor activities and coordination of financial support at the national level as well as increased political commitment. It would also entail financial audits of the forest sector in order that the necessary fiscal reforms may be undertaken and the contribution of the forest sector to economic development may be improved.

29. Last but not least, there is a need to step up strong measures against illegal operations within the forest sector (illegal logging and poaching) and to promote more efficient and transparent control of forest management activities.

Notes

[1] ITFF members include the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank.

[2] The reports can be accessed through the web site of the Division for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat (http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/).

[3] Washington, D.C., WRI, 2000.